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ABSTRACT

This booklet is intended to provide adult basic education students with some tips on reading to their children. The booklet emphasizes that it is important for parents to read to their children (regardless of how well they read themselves). The benefits that parents and children derive when parents read to children are discussed. Tips on finding time for reading aloud, selecting appropriate books, and obtaining children's books are also provided. Suggestions for parents who are not very good readers are discussed in a separate section (including finding picture books with no words, using beginner books or easy readers, making up stories based on a book's pictures, finding tapes or records of children's books, asking a friend or tutor to tape a few children's books and then practicing reading the books, and getting a tutor or joining an adult reading class). A list of do's and don'ts for getting and keeping children interested in reading concludes the booklet. (MN)

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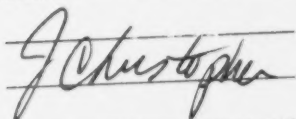
"READ TO ME!"

Some Tips on Reading to Children

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Table of Contents

Introduction.	5
"I want to read to my child because..." . 6	
"How old is old enough? And when are kids too old?"	8
"OK. So how do I start?"	10
"When will I ever find the time?"	12
"What books should we read together?" . .	14
"Where can I find children's books?" . .	16
"What if my own reading isn't very good?"	18
"Anything else I need to know?"	20

Introduction

Most parents know that it's a good idea to read to their children. And most parents want to. But many parents never do. Some people are too busy and never get around to it. Some people who can read OK think that they are no good at reading out loud. And some people have trouble reading at all.

Even if you are one of these people, you can enjoy reading to your child. Reading a child's story doesn't have to take a lot of time. There are ways to practice reading out loud. And even if reading is hard for you, there are things you can do right now that will help you and your child enjoy children's books together.

This book will give you some ideas about reading to children. Some of the ideas will be things you already know; others may be new to you. Use the ideas that work for you and your child. The most important thing is to make reading together a habit, and to ENJOY IT!!

"I want to read to my child because...."

There are lots of good reasons for reading to your child. Here are some of them:

- Sharing a story together can be fun for both of you.
- Reading books can bring you closer together. It can help you get to know each other better.



-photo by Bill Wunsch

- Reading to very young children helps them learn to talk.
- Stories make children think and use their imaginations.
- Children learn new things from books (words, ideas, information).
- Stories help children learn about their feelings and other people's feelings.
- Stories can help children think of ways to deal with their problems.
- Reading a story can help a child to calm down.
- Being read to teaches children to like books and makes them want to learn to read on their own.
- Reading to children helps them get used to the way stories sound. That makes it easier to learn to read.
- Taking time to read a story together gives your child the idea that reading is important to you.
- Taking time to read a story together tells your child that he is important to you.
- Reading to your child can help you to improve your own reading.

"How old is old enough?
And when are kids too old?"

Many people think that you should read to children even before they are born -- when they are still in the womb. They believe that unborn babies like hearing their parents' voices.



-photo by Marie Jones
courtesy of Chestnut Hill Local

Reading to infants seems to make them feel calm and safe. Until a child can focus on pictures, it doesn't matter much what you read out loud, as long as you like it. Infants don't care if you read the telephone book or the TV guide -- as long as you read it to them!

Children of all ages like hearing a good story -- including adult children! Even after children can read pretty well by themselves, they often still like Mom or Dad to read an old favorite. If you start out reading to your younger children, don't be surprised if the older ones come and join you!

"OK. So how do I start?"

First of all, relax. Get cozy. Talk about the book before you open it. Read the title and talk about the picture on the cover. Ask your child what she thinks it will be about. Get her excited about reading the story.

Then, start reading. Read like you talk -- use lots of expression in your voice. Stop often to talk about the pictures. Take time to answer your child's questions. Ask her things like:

"What do you think that means?"

"How does that animal sound?"

"What would you do if you were in the story?"

"What do you think will happen next?"

"Did you like that part?"

Let your child help hold the book and turn the pages. If she turns too many pages at once, help her see that they have to go in order for the story to make sense.

Keep the story reading times short, unless your child is very interested in hearing more. Finish the story unless she becomes restless or bored. If that happens, stop for a while. It's better to stop reading while your child is still enjoying it. You don't want to make her tired of books.

The best way to keep your child interested in the story is to keep her involved. Encourage her to act out parts, make sound effects, and draw pictures to go with the story. Make up silly readings of old stories sometimes. Use your child's name or the names of other people or characters your child likes in the story. If the story is one of your child's favorites, have her "read" the story to you.

The most important thing is to HAVE FUN!

"When will I ever find the time?"

Reading to children doesn't have to take a lot of extra time. That's because you can do it just about anywhere and anytime. Bedtime and naptime are great times for a story. Being read to makes going to bed nicer for your child, and it will help him settle down and go to sleep.

There are lots of other times and places that work for story-reading, too. You can read together:

- in a rocking chair.
- on a park bench (or the grass).
- in the doctor's waiting room.
- before or after a meal.
- when your child is over-excited.
- when he deserves a treat for being good.

You don't always need a book for a story. You can tell a story even if you're busy washing dishes or folding laundry. Or you can have your child entertain you by telling you his favorite stories.

In fact, just about any time and any place is good for a story. You have to find the times and places that work out best for you and your child.



-photo by Beth Jones
courtesy of Chestnut Hill Local

"What books should we read together?"

Sometimes your child will choose books and sometimes you will. Here are some suggestions for choosing children's books:

- Choose books you think your child will like.
- Choose books you like.
- Read some of your child's old favorites.
- Introduce your child to some new books.
- Choose some books that are just for fun.
- Choose some books that will teach your child something, but make sure they teach in a fun way.
- Choose books that seem right for your child's age and development (not too old or too challenging).
- Keep away from books you think may confuse or upset your child.
- Look at the pictures. To children, the artwork is at least as important as the words.

- For babies and little children, get books that are made of plastic, heavy cardboard or cloth. Make sure they are OK to put in the mouth, because you know that's where they will go!
- When looking for books in the library, choose some books that look well-used. There is probably a good reason why they look that way.

As you read to your child more, you will get a better "feel" for what books will work well for the two of you.

"Where can I find children's books?"

Children's books are very easy to find. You can borrow them from:

- the public library. (You can often get records there, too.)
- the library at your child's school or daycare center.
- your friends and relatives who have children.

It's important that children own some books, too. You can buy children's books at most bookstores and many toy and department stores. They are often very expensive at those places. Some places you can find books for less money are:

- yard and garage sales and flea markets.
- used and discount book stores.
- thrift stores.
- supermarkets.
- school book fairs.

Sometimes you can find books free -- in friends' attics or basements or from other parents whose children have outgrown their story-books.



You and your child can also make your own books. Tell your own story to go along with pictures from newspapers or magazines, family photographs, or drawings. Or help your child make up her own story. You could tape record the stories and write them down later. Often these personal picture books become family treasures.

"What if my own reading isn't very good?"

Many people think that they don't read well enough to read out loud to their children. If you feel that way, there are some things you can do about it. First, remind yourself that you don't have to be a pro. You'll be reading to your children, not to a TV audience! Then:

- Find picture books with no words. (Ask your children's librarian to help you find them. Just talking about the pictures will help your child learn to enjoy books.

- Look for picture books that you can read well enough to figure out the harder words. Many libraries have a whole section of "Easy Readers" or "Beginner Books". Practice reading the books you choose out loud -- over and over -- until you feel OK about reading them to your child.

- With young children, you can make up your own stories to go with the pictures, even if the book is hard to read.

- Find tapes or records of children's books at the library or where children's books are sold. ("Read-Along" books are sold with tapes.) Listen to them as you and your child page through the book together.

- Ask someone you trust (a friend, teacher, tutor) to tape record a few children's books for you. Use the tapes to learn and practice reading the stories.

- Get a reading tutor or join an adult reading class. Ask a librarian, a trusted teacher, or a community or religious leader about adult reading programs in your area.

REMEMBER: The only way to get good at this is to practice it!

"Anything else I need to know?"

When it comes to reading to children, there are a few "don'ts" to keep in mind:

- Don't ask your child, "Do you want TV or a story?" That's like asking, "Do you want a cookie or a carrot?"
- Don't start a story if you only have time for a page or two. It's not fair.
- Don't take away story reading when your child has been bad. You don't want him to think of punishment when he thinks of books.
- Don't make your child listen to a story he doesn't like.
- Don't tell your child that this is for his own good!
- Don't worry if your child loves a story that seems too babyish. He just wants to feel safe.

- Don't give up if your child doesn't love story-reading right away. Sometimes it takes a few good stories to get a child hooked.
- Don't feel bad if you make some mistakes when you read. You will get better as you do more of it. And your child will still love you and the story-times.

And some more good things to do:

- Go to the library together. Look through the books together and take some home.
- Take your child to story hours at the library.
- Help your child learn how to love and take care of books, whether they are borrowed from the library or his own.
- Set a good example: make sure your child sees you reading sometimes.

- Make sure your son sees men reading sometimes so he knows it's OK for boys to like reading.
- Sing songs with your child, play word games, and encourage him to play with words (making up rhymes and riddles). All these things will help prepare him for reading.
- When you give gifts to your child, make some of them books. Ask other people in your family and your friends to do the same.
- Help your child make his own books and stories.
- Help your child make a bookcase for his books out of a box or crate. You can paint it or cover it with contact paper or your child's own drawings to make it cheerful.

Above all: Have fun together with books!

